In the Claims:

Please cancel claim 7 without prejudice.

Please amend claims 1-6, 11-15 and 17 as follows:

1. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method via enabling in-band communications comprising the steps of:

utilizing a SAN management application for communicating with a host bus adapter (HBA) device driver, and

providing a pass through by in said HBA device driver through a host bus adapter (HBA) for passing communications to a device in the storage area network from said SAN management application including at least one topology analysis command.

2. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of utilizing said SAN management application for communicating with a HBA device driver includes the step of providing a management application agent coupled between said SAN management application and said HBA device driver.

3. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 2 includes the step of utilizing said management application agent for providing predefined, fibre channel standard, protocol functions for communicating with said device in the storage area network.

4. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 3 wherein the step of providing predefined protocol functions for communicating with said device in the storage area network

include the step of providing a ~~common~~ transport ~~(CT)~~ protocol function and an extended link service (ELS) protocol function.

5. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 4 wherein the step of providing a pass through ~~by~~ <u>in</u> said <u>HBA</u> device driver ~~through a host bus adapter (HBA~~) includes the step of providing a common transport (CT) pass through and an extended link service (ELS) pass through by said <u>HBA</u> device driver ~~through said host bus adapter (HBA)~~.

6. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 1 wherein the step of providing said pass through ~~by~~ <u>in</u> said <u>host bus adapter (HBA)</u> device driver ~~through a host bus adapter (HBA)~~ for passing communications to a device in the storage area network from said SAN management application includes the step of providing said pass through for passing a plurality of commands.

7. (canceled)

8. (original)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 6 includes the step of providing said pass through for passing at least one performance analysis command.

9. (original)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 6 includes the step of providing said pass through for passing at least one attribute analysis command.

10. (original) A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration method as recited in claim 6 includes the step of providing said pass through for passing at least one configuration command.

11. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications comprising:

a storage area network (SAN) management application for communicating with at least one SAN-connected host system;

said SAN-connected host system including a management application agent for communicating with a host bus adapter (HBA) device driver;

said HBA device driver for communicating with a device in the storage area network; said HBA device driver including at least one pass through service for passing a plurality of commands to said device in the storage area network; said commands including at least one topology analysis command.

12. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 11 wherein SAN-connected host system includes a fibre channel hierarchy and a ~~standard~~ HBA device driver interface.

13. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 12 wherein said at least one pass through service bypasses said ~~standard~~ HBA device driver interface and a plurality of ~~upper~~ layers of said fibre channel hierarchy.

14. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 13 wherein said plurality of ~~upper~~ layers of said fibre channel hierarchy includes a small computer system interface (SCSI) protocol driver, an upper level protocol (UPL) mapping, and a common services layer.

15. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 11 wherein said at least one pass through service for passing said plurality of commands to said device in the storage area network include ~~at least one topology analysis command and~~ at least one attribute analysis command.

16. (original) A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 16 further includes at least one performance analysis command and at least one configuration command.

17. (currently amended)   A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 11 wherein said management application agent provides predefined protocol functions for communicating with said device in the storage area network; said predefined protocol functions including a ~~common~~ transport ~~(CT)~~ protocol function.

18. (original) A storage area network (SAN) management and configuration apparatus via enabling in-band communications as recited in claim 11 wherein said management application agent provides predefined protocol functions for

communicating with said device in the storage area network; said predefined protocol

functions including an extended link service (ELS) protocol function.